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The Land-Grant College in Changing Times: Commencement Address Delivered at the University of Maine

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of
Agriculture and Home Economics

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THE LAND-GRANT COLLEGE IN CHANGING TIMES

This is graduation day. The four long years that seemed to stretch so far into the future when you entered as freshmen have passed unbelievably fast and the achievement of the diploma is saddened by the thought of leaving a place that has become dear to you, a place that will become ever more dear as you proceed with your chosen life's work.

And you who have come to see a son or daughter, a relative or friend, graduate from your state university are feeling repaid for the sacrifices that you have made that your young people may go into the world prepared for work, living, and service. I know you feel today that those sacrifices were worth while, and you are happy that you could help to give these young men and young women an opportunity for a college education; happy that you can deliver to the world young people of sound body and able mind; young people with the habits of work and living for which the people of Maine are known; young people with the training, the educational discipline and philosophy of living, with which this fine university has long endowed its graduates; young people who will ably serve society and, because they carry your blood, will thereby give you immortality.

You members of the senior class are particularly well fitted and prepared to meet the personal problems of making a living and living a good life to meet the public problems of your time, for your education has been received in a university that is peculiarly a part of the life of the people, a university that draws strength and guidance from the folks of this state and in turn gives leadership to the State—a Land-Grant institution.

Perhaps it is fitting at this time to remind ourselves that these Land-Grant institutions were founded in the midst of a great civil war, when, although the life of the nation seemed threatened, statesmen had the vision and foresight to prepare for the education of future generations. It was a great representative of the common people from the neighboring state of Vermont who secured the

passage of the Land-Grant College Act through Congress, and it was a great representative of the common people of the state of Illinois who, as President, approved this act and made the Land-Grant colleges possible.

In a time when nearly all of the institutions of higher learning devoted themselves to the classics or the learned professions and disdained the sciences, the preparation for vocations, and the mechanic arts—now known as engineering—the Land-Grant institutions embarked on a new program of education which immediately made them a part of the life of the common folks and entirely different from the cloistered institutions which had preceded them in Europe and America.

Now, again, as many times in the past, your university, you who are graduating, you who are alumni, and you who from long association both own and belong to the university are facing the task of how to define and analyze these public problems; how to plan your activities and organize the activities of groups to serve the needs of the nation.

We are facing a great world crisis. The ideals and the principles in which we have long believed are being challenged and denied by strong and powerfully armed nations. Freedom of speech, freedom of worship, and freedom of man, which are fundamental principles on which this republic was founded, are now being denied, and denied by people who have developed a vast military might to inflict and enforce their new ideologies.

We cannot see clearly what our part will be, whether we shall be involved in a conflict abroad, whether we shall be defending ourselves against aggression, or whether we shall be assisting a suffering and exhausted world to heal its wounds. At last we have awakened to the necessity of preparing ourselves for whatever may come. We see clearly that a war which uses all modern mechanical implements of destruction can only be resisted by developing great mechanical means of defense, and so our government, with the full support of the people, is engaged in a program of preparedness on a scale never before dreamed of in this country.

It is now evident that we shall do things which are distasteful to a peace-loving people but which we recognize as necessary. First, we shall expend much more of our national and personal incomes on defense than anyone has yet dared state. If, as is reported, Germany spent a hundred billion dollars in preparing for war, we may

have some idea of what it is going to cost us. We need to open our eyes, stiffen our backs, tighten our belts, and get ready for it.

Your ancestors came into this great state with little possessions except a few simple tools, a willingness to work, faith in a new land, and a new way of life. The freedom and security which they worked and bled for is worth any sacrifice that we may make to retain it. If this means giving up our luxuries and some of our necessaries, giving parts and all of the lives of some of us, yet we shall preserve our freedom and our ideals with which to build anew. It is perhaps the farmer and the people of the rural towns who see this the most clearly—that when all these troubles shall have passed, whatever the losses, these farms and these fields will still be here, cattle will still feed in the pastures, and potatoes will grow in Aroostook County. Out of the fertility of the land and the work of the people, the nation will be repaired and rebuilt and will progress towards a better and better civilization.

And second, in order to gain speed in preparedness and efficiency in operation, we shall voluntarily surrender for a time many of our personal rights and liberties—freedom of speech, freedom of action, freedom of discussion. In a period such as this some injustices will be done and suffering will be caused among innocent persons. You who remember the first World War can recall instances of this.

As in the first World War, we shall probably subject ourselves to control plans and regimentation such as this free nation would never endure in times of peace. We shall accept them, work wholeheartedly with them, and do our patriotic duty. No people can work so completely and so effectively together as those who voluntarily and with understanding submit themselves to control and direction.

We have much to do to explain and persuade our neighbors as to the reasonableness and necessity for these controls. At times we shall need to exercise leadership in resisting unnecessary and unwise controls which infringe too heavily upon our personal liberties. This will call for a rare degree of understanding, of patience, and balanced good judgment.

Many of us are interested in the food supply of the nation and its importance to the food needs of the world. There is no problem where we need to study our facts so judiciously and weigh our decisions so carefully. We have so recently been committed to pro-

grams of destroying food or restricting production that it is hard to adjust ourselves to the new situation. Any careful study of the available statistics of food production and population growth will reveal some startling situations quite different from some of the sweeping conclusions of the general public.

The present supply of food crops in the nation as a whole is much more nearly in adjustment to population needs than most people appreciate, and we have little food to export on our present rate of production. For many years we have had on hand at the end of the harvest season only enough food, other than wheat, to last us twelve days. In 1939 we had enough for twenty-two days. This may be a comfortable stock for a nation which because of climatic conditions is able to harvest crops of some sort, somewhere, every day in the year, but it does not give much promise of exportable surpluses. Moreover, the statistics of the Department of Agriculture indicate that we should not normally export any food crops in the future except wheat and fruit.

Let us explore these figures a little further. The government figures on the production per capita and export-import balances show that we have been for some years on a net import basis for dairy products, that we need all our mutton, beef, and poultry products in the United States, and except to help feed our allies, shall never export more of these. We may export a little pork in favorable years but only for a few years. We shall export some lard for a few years, but only a few. We need to import beef and other meats. We already import more dairy products than we export. We shall need to export fruit for perhaps a generation. We may export wheat for the same length of time. Aside from the food crop, we need to export tobacco and cotton for many years to come. There is an interesting figure on beef. If we should consume as much beef per person as we did at the beginning of the first World War, we should use all that the United States can produce and could take one-half of Argentine's exportable surplus.

In fats and oils we have such a shortage that the nation, in addition to consuming all the cottonseed oil produced in the South, also imports about half the cottonseed oil going into the export trade from other nations.

We are alarmed over the present surplus of wheat but more alarmed because Canada also has such a large surplus at the same

time. If we are to feed European nations at war, or in peace, these surpluses may disappear very quickly.

We need to re-examine our thinking on this whole food supply situation and perhaps be ready for changed programs to meet the conditions. Already our government has asked farmers to increase the production of tomatoes and other canning crops, eggs and poultry, dairy products, and dry beans. These needs will be hard to meet because of the labor shortage on farms.

In the Northeast, the situation is serious because of a combined labor shortage and spring drought. The loss of some farm boys to the military forces and the serious draining of farm labor into war-time industries by high wage-rates will undoubtedly cause serious curtailment of agricultural production. This could be partially offset by the use of more and newer labor-saving machinery, but restrictions on the use of steel and the low income of farmers limit this adjustment. The prices of farm products must rise enough to make it possible for farmers to compete with city industries in hiring labor.

This is not so alarming to consumers as it may sound, for it is a well-known economic law that a certain percentage rise in price to the farmer will cause a rise of approximately half that percentage to the consumer if the costs of distribution remain the same. We need also to keep in mind that the United States had had five excellent crop years in succession and that we cannot expect as favorable weather conditions to continue.

The Land-Grant colleges are teaching institutions, they are research institutions, and through their extension activities they conduct the largest and most important adult education activity in America. In all these fields, important work is to be done in meeting the present emergency. From the nature of its work the Land-Grant university had had experience with short intensive courses, with specialized objectives, and with long-term professional training. These institutions at the beginning were new departures from the older, more formalized colleges. Perhaps the time has come to test the flexibility of our organizations and the flexibility of our minds in instituting new departures from our now formalized procedures to meet new emergencies.

All educational institutions, and particularly these state supported ones, face a real challenge. We have boasted of our skill and effectiveness in using the scientific method. Can we now use

the scientific method to study the situation which confronts our nation, evaluate the possibilities within our own institutions, and evolve a well-considered plan of service to meet the national need? Do we have the vision, the originality, and the daring to consider none of these patterns of educational procedure sacred; to be willing to use to advantage or to modify four-year courses, four-month semesters, thirty-two-week years, over-formalized entrance requirements, and prerequisite courses?

I am not suggesting that these be abandoned. I am only stating the need in a time of national emergency for re-examining our whole procedure with a willingness to make sweeping changes if the needs justify. I am only suggesting that we, in the Land-Grant colleges, in 1941, proceed with the same vision and originality, the willingness to break with precedent or tradition, that characterized the founders of these colleges three-quarters of a century ago.

Perhaps it is useful and desirable that the governing faculties and trustees of institutions which are so vitally a part of the life of the people be occasionally shaken to their foundations and challenged to meet an entirely new and emergency situation. After all, that, too, is a part of the life and experiences of the people.

We are fighting for freedom in this war: freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of religion, and, fundamentally, freedom of the individual. All of these, as we well know, are denied and abolished by Nazi Germany under the Hitler regime. But this fight for freedom is only a part of the long struggle through the ages. It is the everlasting struggle for greater and greater freedom for more and more individuals. This struggle is a part of our Christian life; it is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ; and the struggle, though often-times seeming to be a losing one in any decade or generation, has been an immensely successful one through the centuries.

If we become discouraged on any one day or during any one month or even in one year, we need to get something of the perspective that comes from a study of all history during the Christian era. There have been dark years, but through the nineteen centuries the general trend has always been upwards towards a greater and richer freedom for more and more people.

The universities have always been centers of free thought and free action. They must remain such. No matter how great the emergency nor how great the peril, the freedom of scientists and

scholars must be protected. And these same scientists and scholars must appreciate and respect the obligations upon them as educational leaders to work together, to cooperate with the people of their state and their nation in meeting immediate needs and in promoting the general welfare. This is not the time when a person of ability should cloister himself away from the problems of the world of the moment. It is a time for immense effort, a time for sacrifice, for service, for cooperation in service.

One of the greatest dangers that confront a university, its student body, and its alumni is the tendency to become too stabilized, to let its program become too crystalized and unchangeable. We dislike to change, to adjust to new conditions, and yet the world in which we live is all the time changing. If our university, our alma mater, our great publicly-supported, publicly responsible institution, is to maintain the leadership which you as alumni desire, which is the objective of its faculty and the hope of each state, changes in university program and procedure must accompany changes in the world in which we live.

You who are of middle age have seen far-reaching, revolutionary changes in business, in living, in government, and in international relations. Within a short half-century you have seen the coming of rural free delivery, the radio, the telephone connection, into most home whether urban or rural. You have seen increased and extended facilities for education, health, and personal security.

The automobile, improved roads, and snow removal not only increase the size of your neighborhoods tenfold, but also make possible the development of a closely affiliated country and urban society such as we have never had before in this country. Perhaps the greatest change during the past generation has been an increasing appreciation of the responsibility of society for caring for unfortunates, an acceptance as a public social responsibility of the programs for old-age security, workmen's compensation for injuries, unemployment insurance, and other social obligations. Some of us may think at times that these have come too quickly or gone too far; we may criticize their administration locally, in the state or in the nation; but viewing them in the large, with a proper perspective, we see these important factors emerging.

First, in social legislation many of the European countries, including Great Britain, were many years ahead of us. Second, this whole development of social legislation is a part of a world-wide

movement among the more advanced countries aimed at promoting and protecting the health, happiness, and general welfare of all the people. It is inevitable that it shall include many crack-brained suggestions and attempts and that its administration will be often unwise in the beginning days, but these are momentary and incidental.

Fundamentally, we should recognize the social legislation of the past few years as one of the great advances of our civilization, one of the great changes that has come in our lifetime, and we should work constructively with it to make all these programs more sound, more practical, more economical, and more serviceable in a modern society.

In this, your Land-Grant institutions will have a part and probably a greater part than any of us now anticipate. Here center great reservoirs of factual material and teaching experiences. Upon these may be built the social programs which are best adapted to each state and which are most in accord with the desires and objectives of each separate state.

I do not know what are the best social programs for the State of Maine, but I am confident that if those programs are built by the people of Maine, with many people participating, and if they are based on the desires, the aspirations, the ideals of the constructive and forward-looking people of the State, then they will meet the needs of the people of Maine.

I need not enumerate to this audience the many other changes that have come in our time. But it is highly important that we understand and appreciate that these changes have not stopped—that changes will probably occur in the future quite as rapidly as in the past. If you and I have in our home a score of conveniences or luxuries that our fathers did not have, then it is logical to expect that our sons will have in their homes a score of new conveniences and luxuries which we cannot even vision at the present time.

It is in this that we see much of our hope for preventing overproduction and surplus of farm and manufactured products in the future. Fundamentally, there is no reason why society cannot consume all that it produces. If we had efficient methods of distribution, a society should never have great surpluses of agricultural or manufactured products as a whole. Temporary surpluses of one commodity might occur but widespread surpluses should

never exist. Society ought to be able to consume all that it can produce, if the problem of efficient distribution is solved.

This problem of distribution is probably as large and as difficult as all the problems of production added together. Yet the Land-Grant institutions have had large sums for research in production and achieved great successes, while receiving almost no appropriations for research on problems of marketing and distribution.

There is every reason to expect that the problems of distribution will yield to the scientific methods used by research institutions just as the problems of production have yielded. That these problems shall be solved is quite as important to the consumer in the city as to the producer in the country. The solution of the problem of distributing farm products will open the way to the solution of the equally baffling problem of efficiently distributing manufactured products.

To a very large extent the welfare of society, protection against business depressions, health and nutrition of the people, and the standard of living of our nation depend upon the solving of this problem of efficient distribution. It is the Land-Grant colleges that should do most to solve this problem, and this is likely to be the great contribution of the Land-Grant colleges in the next generation.

This is a time when the nation, the community, and the individual must make plans for an unknown future. That the future is unknown makes planning more difficult, but it does not obviate the necessity for planning—rather, it makes planning the more necessary. The uncertain future and the international crisis necessitate flexible plans. The critical need for united action by all the people is forcing us to adopt all kinds of controls and regimentation of individuals for the welfare of the great community of individuals of the nation.

If we must have controls and regimentation, there are two great safeguards which may be adopted:

First, just so far as possible, all control plans should be formulated by the people themselves or their duly constituted representatives. These plans should come from the hopes and desires of the people, and as many people as possible should be used in formulating them. They will be the more effective that way.

Second, we need always to keep in mind that after the emer-

gency shall have passed, the people of a democracy must return to democratic procedures. This may be difficult and it will be difficult to insert the checks and protections, the safeguards of temporary controls, and the protection against controls becoming permanent.

We may well ask ourselves how we can assure a return to democratic procedures when the emergency shall have passed. Perhaps the greatest protection will be to choose as your leaders persons who have a burning desire for freedom in their hearts, free men who expect to live as free men and are determined that the nation shall be governed in such a way that their children can grow up free.

In all of this the university can play an important part. Universities are community centers of freedom. They are centers where freedom of action and speech have always flourished. The use of the scientific method implies freedom to accept and to state the results of experimentation without regard to whether new truths are in accord with political theories or ideologies.

The tragic events of the past two years, the disasters of the present, must not cause us to lose faith. If we view these times against the background of history, we find that mankind has faced similar disasters over and over again, and ultimately right has prevailed. Freedom and justice have never perished from the earth. Many times they seem to be temporarily lost, but century by century, generation by generation, the common man has always gained greater freedom, greater security, greater happiness, and greater consideration for the welfare of his brothers as the years roll by. Over and over man has been tried, disciplined, tempered, and refined by suffering, but ultimately he progresses upward.

If we have the faith of our freedom-loving forefathers, if we are worthy successors to the men and women who created this republic, if we have the courage, the toughness of fiber, and the will-power of the pioneers who conquered the wilderness to build a new civilization, then through this crisis we shall retain such a spirit of freedom in our hearts as will insure our nation remaining a democracy when the smoke of battle shall have blown away.

In the months to come and the years that will follow, your state university, a great Land-Grant institution, cooperating with similar universities in the forty-eight states, will play an increasingly important role of leadership. You who today become alum-

ni, joining with the thousands who have preceded you, will have the opportunity to apply everything that you have learned here in leading the world to a happier day. You have received a fine education, an education that prepares you to make a living, an education that prepares you to live happily with other people, your neighbors and your family, an education that prepares you for duties of good citizenship.

It is unnecessary for me to remind you of the responsibilities which you assume. You know them and will discharge them well. As you live and work and serve through the active, happy years ahead, remember that happiness comes not so much from what you obtain for yourself as from what you do for others. You should earn a good living and enjoy a feeling of competency in your chosen field. After that, you should give service to your state and your nation.

It is always more important to give of yourself than to give money or goods. Do not seek credit for your successes, and credit will accrue to you anyhow. The less you seek leadership the more certain it is to seek you. Try to do the day's work competently and faithfully in order that you may feel that you have rendered a service to mankind.

Then whether leadership or credit come to perch on your shoulder or not, you will have the inner glow and contentment that comes from a job well done, a service well rendered; your community will be the better for your having lived there; and you will be a worthy alumnus of the University of Maine.